1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

346 images which he bought from Bhutan to replace the small existing ones. The monasteries are the only occasions in Lepcha life for conspicuous display and ornament and there is a constant feeling of emulation and friendly rivalry between the different villages as to who shall have the largest, most beautiful and best equipped monastery. Until recently that of Lingthem was easily the finest in every way, but in 1937 the people of Gyatong decided to build an [476] even bigger one (in the building of which the people of Lingthem will aid). Although the people of Lingthem hope in time that they will be able to rebuild their monastery so as to be even bigger than the new one at Gyatong they cannot consider doing so yet; but to counterbalance the effort of their neighbours the people of Lingthem are collecting money to replace the present thatched roof with one of corrugated iron. From the aesthetic point of view the change will be an unmitigated disaster, but the present thatch, though pleasant to look at, is inadequate to keep out the almost continuous rain, as the condition of the painted woodwork and hanging pictures on silk (*tang-ku*) shows.

[386] The monastery is made of stone, wood and plaster; the walls are coloured white with a broad band of red (the dye is a clay brought from a considerable distance) and picked out with blue; the windows, doors and porch are made out of wood and are quite pleasantly carved in stylised geometrical patterns. The main place of worship is on the ground floor with the entrance in the middle of the north wall, consisting of a pair of wooden doors. These 346 doors are protected by a built-out porch, on the top of which is a 778 balcony which runs the whole length of the first storey; this porch is enclosed except for a fairly narrow entrance in the centre and on three sides there are inserted prayer wheels[5] about four feet from the ground. These prayer wheels are filled with written prayers or *mantra* inside a wooden drum which is set on spikes so as to revolve freely; the outside of the drum is covered with paper inscribed with a prayer in Len-za script. When the pious approach the monastery they circumambulate it three times, always keeping the

[188] [5] One of the tenets of lamaism is that a prayer repeated mechanically is as valid as one said orally. The two chief mechanisms for mechanical praying are (1) prayer drums filled with written prayers or *mantra*: turning the wheel is equivalent to uttering all the contained prayers, and (2) prayer flags. These are strips of linen stamped with printed prayers; each time the flag flutters in the breeze it is as though the setter-up had said all the prayers printed on it. These devices are described more fully in Chapter Seven, pp. 190–191.

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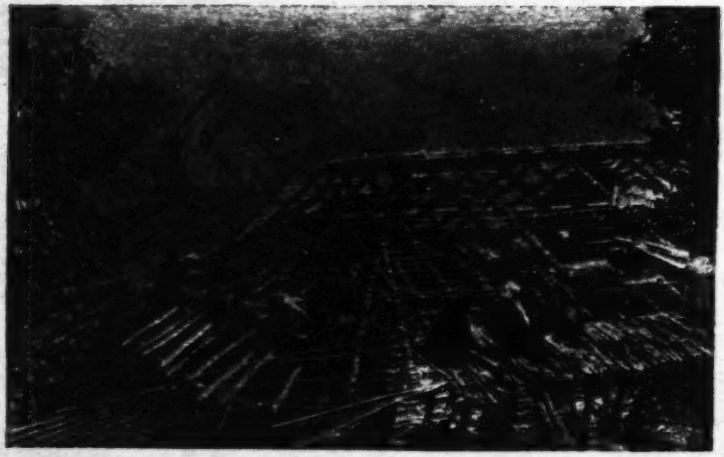

EVERYBODY HELPS WITH THE THATCHING OF PEMBU'S ROOF

[facing p. 68]

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

342 so as to gratify the devils which have taken up their abode in the neighbourhood so that they shall not trouble the work in progress. Then the four corner-posts and the centre post are set up, and the low stone walls, on which the house will rest, are built. The building should always start from the east. After the pillars and stone walls have been set up straight by an overseer the building proceeds without direction, the walls, flooring, ceiling, rafters and finally the thatch being built. When people know that [476] a house is being built or repaired they come to help spontaneously; they are given no pay or wages of any sort except a meal at the end of the day; but they know that they in their turn will receive help when they need it. Men, women and children all lend a hand at the various tasks; but women are considered incapable of handling the biggest pieces of timber.

Some time after its completion the house must be consecrated by lamas and Mun with the ceremony of *Tashi chéné*; ideally this should be performed as soon as the house is completed and repeated twice in subsequent years; but it is often not done immediately for the owner may not possess the ox and other necessary materials. When the first meal is eaten in the completed house some old and experienced man (not the house-owner himself, but it does not matter who else) must make a small hole in the roof immediately above the fireplace and throw out a live ember and some water; this is done so that the smoke may go out properly and not fill the house.

The ceremony of *Tashi chéné* is as follows. First of all incense leaves are burned to pacify the demons who live in the earth below the house and who may have inhabited the trees of which the house is [782] built. Then a live ox is dedicated by a Mun to all the gods, slaughtered and cut up; the head, right foreleg and left hind-leg [465] (these portions are called *ga-zook*) are given to the carpenters who have worked on the house as their fee. After this a lamaist ceremony, with music and readings from the appropriate books, is performed, at the end of which the chief lama present (if possible one of the Dorjé Lapoon)[11] will anoint the house-pillars with blood, *chi*, liquor and butter, starting with the western pillar and proceeding to

[11] Dorjé Lapoon is the title given to the oldest, wisest, and most revered lamas; it is not strictly translatable: dorjé is the sacred 'thunderbolt' which is part of the lama's sacred paraphernalia; lapoon means teacher. In works dealing with Tibet the title is usually translated as 'abbot', but this term seems to me inappropriate for non-resident dignitaries.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

misfortune. Today this is not quite so true; the creation of permanent fields requires the renunciation of immediate good for future benefits, for the household which builds these fields will not be able to get as large a harvest as would otherwise be possible. The consequence is that the difference between the richest and the poorest in the community has somewhat increased, and that households which have a proportionately larger number of working adults to dependents are in a temporarily favoured position. So of course is the Mandal,[1] who can use the free labour to which he is entitled to have terraces made for him.

Up to the present as far as I can tell this new state of affairs has made no important difference to the Lepcha community; their habits of co-operation nullify the differences in wealth. One man even went so far as to say that he would not like to be the richest person in the community, unless everybody else was equally prosperous, as he would have to give all his superfluity to help others. Extra wealth carries with it extra duties; and in point of fact the richest people in Lingthem were also the most heavily indebted. At the same time it must be emphasised that it is the desire of every Lepcha to be rich; when I asked children what they would most like to be, a clever man, or a learned and respected lama, or a great hunter, or a rich man, they would one and all plump for being rich. Chimpet, the son of Tafoor, a member of the most devout lamaist family in Lingthem, and who was himself starting his religious instruction said 'I should like to go and study religion in a Tibetan monastery, but I don't want to go to the State school at Gangtok; the things they teach you there are quite useless, while a lama always gets good presents and feasts. Why, when a rich man dies even the *kané*, the accolyte attending the officiating lama, is given a fine plate and cup and clothes!'[2]

Unless the whole orientation of Lepcha life is changed even greater differences in actual wealth will not fundamentally alter the situation, for there is no possibility of any Lepcha, however rich, exploiting his neighbour, however poor. Help in the work of house or field is always repaid by equivalent help; the most

[1] See Chapter Five, p. 128.

[2] Chimpet's view of the value of secular education is not shared by his father or the other more serious adult members of the community. They have petitioned the State to establish a boarding school in Zongu, for they consider that the extra work entailed by the older children's absence would be counterbalanced by the value of the education received.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Work in the fields, whether sowing, weeding or harvesting, is nearly always done in large parties. These parties are made up partly of relations by blood or marriage, and partly by friends. Since the Lepchas trace relationship back nine generations on the father's side and at least four on the mother's there is a tendency for most villagers to have some relationship; I should guess that out of a dozen Lepchas of Lingthem taken by chance, a relationship chain could be established between eight of them. But this relationship is not necessary for field-helpers; in nearly all the lists I made there were a few people quite unrelated.

Help in the fields is always repaid with a similar amount of labour; for sowing and weeding the helpers are also always given a meal with meat. At harvesting a meal need not be given to people who volunteer their services, but must be given to those who are asked to help. At harvest payment is given in kind: forty to fifty pounds of rice to an adult worker, a big basket of millet or maize, thirty to forty pounds of buckwheat. Children are given proportionately less. The first person to harvest his dry rice, and the last to harvest the wet, must make a small present of the grain to all the other householders. Because cardamum is a money-producing and not a food-producing crop help with it is paid for in money; a rupee a head is given for work in the fields and Rs. 3/– for carrying a maund[6] to market.

iv

The most general food of the Lepchas is rice. This is prepared in four main ways; boiled whole after husking in water and eaten with meat or vegetables or other seasoning; boiled whole in milk; 'puffed', or ground fine and made into a pudding. This ground-rice pudding is often given to children. Wheat and maize may be eaten in the same way if there is no rice, but they are not liked. Buckwheat is ground and mixed with water and baked on the

[6] The *maund*, which is divided into 40 *seers* is the current measure of weight in India. A maund is meant to represent the load one man can lift, and its equivalent in European measure depends partly on *what* is measured, and partly on *where* it is measured. (Similar confusion can be found in various English measures of agricultural produce such as a bushel, or a truss.) On the Indian railways a maund is equated to 80 lbs., which makes the seer 2 lbs. The Lepchas have their own measures according to the size of the basket used. Since all these measures are very rough I have generally given an approximate equivalent in lbs. avoirdupois.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5
Nepal AK1

and it is worth noting that their houses contain no such ventilation. They are, moreover, in the habit of stopping up every crevice and crack with rags or paper, and in addition sleep with their heads completely covered, neither of which does the Lepcha do. The Lepcha house, moreover, has a wooden floor, through the joints of which, since the house is raised off the ground, air can also enter. The Nepali house, on the contrary, is built flush with the ground and has a floor of rammed earth smeared over with a mixture of mud and cow-dung; this last for ceremonial cleanliness.

24th March:

We went this morning to watch a house being re-roofed. It belonged to Pemba, Pichi's Lama brother. When we arrived at about nine o'clock some twenty men, including a number of Lamas, were already putting on new rafters. Only two women were present: Pemba's wife and mother; but others will turn up later, to help in the actual thatching. No payment is made to the helpers; but in addition to being fed while they are working they are given a feast on the conclusion of the work.

Women started to arrive about ten o'clock, and at once started to light fires and prepare the gargantuan meal which seems to be the usual complement of such occasions. Everyone appeared to be completely sober (an unusual state of affairs); but as soon as the women arrived sex was, as usual, the chief topic of conversation. Whenever a woman came anywhere near she would invariably be greeted with some obscene remark, at which all the others would laugh. The greatest joke seemed to be to induce the girls to go up on to the roof, so that men working below could pass personal remarks on such parts of their anatomy as were visible. I must say, however, that the girls seemed ready to play. At one time Pemba's mother, a most efficient and able woman, told the workers to press the thatch well down. "You come up here and we'll press things down all right," somebody shouted. This remark, to which she took not the slightest exception,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

243 Tobgay (his adopted son) and wife, his brother-in-law
[602] (Tempa), and one or two others, all relations of one sort or another. Working in an adjacent patch of forest was an old woman, her adopted son and his wife. The ground was being prepared by means of billhooks, but hoes were also in use. As soon as the undergrowth has been cut away the jungle is burnt and the ground lightly scratched, but not properly turned over. The larger trees are left standing; but the branches are lopped and only the leaves at the top of the tree are left. This is to ensure that they grow again next year, when the land reverts to forest. The ground was the steepest
[311] I have ever seen used for cultivation: in some places it was so steep that it was difficult to stand. Here and there long lengths of wood had been laid along the ground and held in position with pegs: this in an attempt to sheer up the hillside in the steepest places. At the lowest level of the field millet had already been planted: to-day rice was being sown in the central portion, and to-morrow they will plant the top section with maize. Once the planting of a field with rice is commenced it must be finished the same day, or the demons will cause it harm. The rice planted to-day will be reaped in September, when this field will then be used for buck-wheat. This will be ready in December, after which this particular land will lie fallow for another eight years.

243 Jiroong says that the group of people who own adjacent
571 pieces of forest always arrange to cultivate them in the same year; that is to say, the people who are working the fields on either side of Jiroong to-day will be beside him again next year, but in a different part of the forest.

476 Boundaries between fields are roughly marked with stones;
423 but in actual practice an area of this sort is worked as though
243 it was one large field. When people help each other in the fields they do not receive any payment, but are given food during the day. But all help is, of course, reciprocal.

243 The method of sowing was as follows: One person moved slowly along with a stick in each hand. With these two sticks he made a hole a few inches deep into which a second person,

2: Morris T-5 (1937) 1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

439 426 Until about twenty years ago most of the Jongu people used to take forest dyes to Lachen, in North Sikkim, which they exchanged for Tibetan salt and wool. They kept a certain amount of this salt for their own use, but the bulk of it they took into Darjeeling, where they exchanged it for raw cotton, which their women spun into cloth. But gradually the money-lender, who all over India is also a general-trader, wormed his way into Sikkim; and found the Lepchas easy prey. One rather unexpected result of this is that the Jongu people no longer wander far from home; and although most of the older people have been often as far afield as Darjeeling and Kalimpong, very few of the younger generation have been further than Gangtok, and only then for a very occasional jaunt.

439 608 In the days before the money-lenders arrived most of the Jongu people had a number of *Ingzong*, or blood-brothers, in various parts of the country in order to facilitate their trading relations. A few of the people still have *Ingzong* in Lachen, but the system seems to be gradually lapsing except as a means of cementing a close friendship. Thus, a number of Lingtem men have become *Ingzong* with fellow-villagers; but in these cases the relationship has no economic basis.

● 476 In times of trouble an *Ingzong* will help one, and even work one's fields, if necessary. Karma says that one can always be sure of a good meal at the house of an *Ingzong;* but apart from this, it is useful to have a friend whom one can regard almost as a relation. He says there is no ceremony in acquiring an *Ingzong;* but the two men will usually drink out of the same bowl and exchange ceremonial scarves. If one wishes, one can cease the relationship: this is not done formally, but merely allowed to lapse gradually and naturally. 834 There are apparently no sexual privileges with the womenfolk of an *Ingzong*, nor, on the other hand, any particular taboos; but owing to the fact that sexual relations among the Lepchas are, in any case, so free, my information on this point is somewhat conflicting. The *Ingzong* relationship is carried out only by men.